

Legislature of the State to "perform miracles" for their protection from the evils of mismanagement.

It is doubtful whether in the city of New-York it would be quite safe in the first instance to intrust the framing of a charter to a convention made up of delegates chosen by the voters of the city. A charter which should give its people the fullest measure of self-government in local affairs might be devised by a competent commission of its own citizens, and once adopted it might be secured against all tinkering by the Legislature. There is a proposition on foot for the creation of an enlarged municipality consisting of the present cities of New-York and Brooklyn and the contiguous or adjacent territory, including Staten Island. If the proposed consolidation should be made the metropolis thus produced would need a new scheme of government, and the time would be favorable for the adoption of a charter which should make it a self-governing community in everything that pertained to its own local interests. Whether this were to be produced by a commission or a popular convention, it should be secured by constitutional guarantees against the meddling of the State Legislature. The city should be put upon a self-governing basis, shielded from the interference of outside authority, and left to work out its own salvation. We are confident that it would develop the power of self-government under the stress of responsibility for its own well-being, its people finding out that in order to have their affairs properly managed they would have to attend to the business themselves. Here is a problem that is greater for the city of New-York than for any other municipality in the country, and either it can be successfully solved or else it must be admitted that the principle of self-government is a failure when applied to large cities. Government of a people by authority outside of itself is always a failure.

SELF-GOVERNMENT FOR CITIES.

The most radical suggestion on the subject of self-government for cities that we have lately seen is contained in the annual message of Gov. CAMPBELL to the Legislature of Ohio. After speaking of the evil of a continual patching of city governments "with special legislative enactments designed to correct real or imaginary grievances," Gov. CAMPBELL declares that the true solution of the problem "would seem to be in a provision whereby cities may govern themselves without interference from any outside authority." For this purpose he recommends an amendment of the Constitution of the State, "so constructed as to enable the people of any city to call a charter convention upon a plan similar to the Constitutional Convention which the people of the State have a right to hold." Such a convention, he says, "could construct a charter which, upon submission to and approval by a popular vote, would become the fundamental law of the city." It would, of course, have to be framed in conformity to the State Constitution and those general laws which must necessarily have the same character throughout the State. "The people of the cities which adopted charters," he adds, "would then be compelled to rely wholly upon themselves for good local government. Such self-reliance would naturally arouse them to vigorous action. When they can no longer sit supinely waiting for the General Assembly to perform miracles for their benefit, they will reform and purify their municipal affairs."

This proposition of Gov. CAMPBELL is certainly based squarely upon the principle of self-government, which is in theory supposed to be the foundation of public institutions in this country, and which is practically applied in small communities and in the government of States. If put in practice it would test the question whether the people of large cities are capable of self-government in their local affairs, as it can be tested in no other way. It is certain that no people, whether of a city or a State or a nation, ever acquires the capacity for self-government by being deprived of the opportunity of trying to exercise it. It is also certain that the government of cities in this country through the constant interposition of State authority has not proved successful. Representatives in the Legislature who come from rural districts and small towns have no conception of the conditions and needs of public administration in a large municipality, and they are apt to be as indifferent to its interests as they are ignorant of them. As a result of their ignorance and indifference, their efforts at restricting or controlling the government of cities are often misdirected and injurious, and still more frequently they are directed to some political object which is inconsistent with good administration.

On the other hand, while it is true that a large element in the population of cities is made up of persons who have no appreciation of the importance and the effect of the administration of public affairs and may be swayed by other motives than a desire for good government, there is no doubt that the intelligent and capable citizens could acquire and maintain control if they were aroused by proper motives to exert their full power and influence. In order to unite so as to accomplish that object, they must lay their political differences aside and put the proper management of their local interests above partisanship. If the whole power and responsibility were put upon them, they would be much more likely to do this than when they rely upon the